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Claremont McKenna College

**Desperate for Democracy:  
A Comparison between Hong Kong's 2014 Umbrella  
Movement and 2019 AntiELAB Protests**

submitted to Professor Minxin Pei

by Annette On Kyo Wong

For  
Senior Thesis  
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## **Abstract**

Within the last five years, the special administrative region of Hong Kong found itself embroiled in two major anti-government protests that brought the entire city to a standstill. While both the 2014 Umbrella Movement and the 2019 AntiELAB Protests were similar in pro-democracy rhetoric and substantive collective action, the 2019 protests devolved into a much more violent and radical movement than that of 2014. This study investigates the factors that contributed to the differing protest cultures of the Umbrella Movement and the AntiELAB Protests. This study first explores the language of the Joint Declaration and Basic Law, and investigates British and Chinese incompetence in handling Hong Kong's handover in order to show that the city's transition into becoming a special administrative region fundamentally shaped its current political vulnerabilities. This study then argues that the 2019 AntiELAB Protests were comparatively more anarchic than any previous political movements as a result of five main factors: the triggers of the protests, the differences in political circumstances, the differing socioeconomic environments, the changes in protest strategies, as well as the radicalization of media and technology usage. Through citing Hong Kong's Basic Law, recent political events, news reporting, socioeconomic statistics, as well as media theory, this study argues that Hong Kong's unstable position as a temporary liberal democracy under Chinese rule contributed to its increasingly radical protest environment. This study concludes by asserting that only by confronting the city's political insecurities, promoting democracy, safeguarding citizens' individual rights, and alleviating socioeconomic inequality, will the government be able to prevent the next large protest that could destroy Hong Kong for good.

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Author,  
Annette Wong

## **Introduction**

On June 12th 2019, Hong Kong's streets were filled with over 1 million protesters rallying against an Extradition Law and Bill that would infringe on the city's core democratic values and freedoms. This law would have allowed Hong Kong citizens to be handed over to the mainland if they were charged with a crime considered rectifiable under Beijing's jurisdiction. The law fundamentally threatened Hong Kong citizens' freedom of speech, democracy, and political expressions. As a result of the panic, the Extradition Law and Bill mobilized fourteen percent of Hong Kong's population, leading to city-wide stand-still, and marking the region's largest ever peaceful mass protest. As months passed, Hong Kong's tranquil community was brandished as it degenerated into violent demonstrations dubbed the Anti-Extradition Law and Bill Movement ('AntiELAB Movement' henceforth). Streets filled with teargas, university campuses burned down, civilians were shot by officers, triad members ran amuck in the city, and Hong Kong's economy took a severe downturn. While the movement initially sought to peacefully persuade the government to withdraw the Extradition Bill, chaos quickly spread over the following seven months as a result of growing anti-Chinese sentiment and dissatisfaction over Beijing's control in Hong Kong. The AntiELAB Movement scarred Hong Kong's image as 'Asia's world city'. Instead of a commercial hub known for order and peaceful civil disobedience, Hong Kong morphed into a city of political polarization, marked by a meltdown of law, order, and democracy.

The 2019 AntiELAB Movement, however, was not the first case of mass activism in Hong Kong triggered by democratic backsliding. Since 2003, Hong Kong has witnessed several large-scale protests fuelled by pro-democracy sentiments. Demonstrations in 2003 successfully

pushed back against a national security legislation that would have prohibited “any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government” (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Basic Law). In both 2005 and 2010, mass protests calling for universal suffrage garnered increased awareness towards the city’s political environment and voting legislation (Gunia). However, out of all of Hong Kong’s demonstrations since the city’s handover, the anti-government protests of 2014 stood as the most closely related to the 2019 AntiELAB Movement, both in terms of scale and political activism.

Hong Kong’s 2014 demonstrations were marked by a series of peaceful street sit-in and protests, widely referred to as the Umbrella Movement. The protests attempted to shut down Beijing-proposed measures aimed at changing Hong Kong’s electoral system. If approved by LegCo, the law would only allow for pre-approved candidates chosen by the Chinese Communist Party to run for Chief Executive. This would prevent universal suffrage from ever being fully achieved in Hong Kong despite earlier promises made by Beijing. Similar to the 2019 AntiELAB Protests, the Umbrella Movement had a remarkable scale of participation, with the annual July 1st march attracting over half a million protesters. Also similar to the 2019 protests, the Umbrella Movement pushed against encroaching Chinese power on Hong Kong’s rule of law. It came to be known globally as a highly politicized pro-democracy movement that challenged China’s authoritarian control in the region. After three months of peaceful sit-ins and mass demonstrations, The Umbrella Movement finally fizzled out, leaving Hong Kong with a global legacy of a democratic nation capable of mass peaceful political activism.

While both Hong Kong’s 2014 and 2019 protests were instrumental in promoting democratic sentiments amongst the city’s population, both held key differences in their triggers,



lengths, and political developments. On one hand, the 2014 Umbrella Movement lasted under three months and remained relatively peaceful throughout its duration. There were seldom instances of violence or destruction. On the other hand, the 2019 AntiELAB Protests continued throughout most of 2019, and became increasingly chaotic as time passed. In the latter half of 2019, Hong Kong deteriorated into disorder and stark polarization. The differences in outcomes of these two protests, that both began with similar intentions, has brought forward questions as to what changed in Hong Kong within five short years.

This study seeks to explain the differences between Hong Kong's 2014 and 2019 protests in order to shed light onto why the 2019 AntiELAB Movement uncharacteristically devolved into mayhem. This study explores the underlying drivers of the AntiELAB Protests to understand why it differs so substantially in size, duration, tactics, and impact compared with the Umbrella Movement. The first chapter of this study provides a brief historical background of the politics of Hong Kong starting with British occupancy, moving through the handover from Britain to China, and ending with the city's post-handover protest environment. Through exploring handover, this study will discuss how the Joint Declaration and Basic Law's drafting processes have influenced Hong Kong's wider political uncertainty and dissatisfaction to this day. This study will then briefly explore the causes and progression of both the 2014 Umbrella Movement and the 2019 AntiELAB Protests to provide socio-political contexts for each movement. Because research for this study began in early 2020, it will only cover events up to January 1st 2020 regarding the effects and progression of the AntiELAB Movement. The second chapter of this study will investigate five core reasons as to why two protests differed so greatly: 1) the triggers of the protests, 2) the political circumstances, 3) the socioeconomic environment, 4) the usage of

technology and media, and finally 5) the changes in protest strategies. The study will then conclude by consolidating its main ideas, and offering possible actions that the Hong Kong government should take to ensure that another protest will not occur and ultimately bring the city to the ground.

By exploring the complex history, politics, and protest cultures of Hong Kong, this study argues that the 2019 AntiELAB Protests were comparatively more anarchic than any of the city's previous political movements as a result of the increasing threats that Beijing has presented towards Hong Kong. The nature of Hong Kong's political climate and its unstable position as a temporary liberal democracy under China has contributed to its citizens' increasing political dissatisfaction. Through understanding the core differences between two of the largest and most influential protests in Hong Kong's post-handover history, this study will show that Hong Kong citizens have resorted to acting radically in recent years as they feel they have no other option than to physically fight for their freedoms. This study will therefore argue that the 2019 AntiELAB Protests were as violent as they were as a result of Hong Kong's changing political circumstances that progressively undermine the diplomatic security of the special administrative region.

## **Chapter 1: History and Background**

In order to better understand the political tensions between the people of Hong Kong and the Chinese government, it is important to first examine the commitments made by Beijing in establishing Hong Kong as a special administrative region.

### **Colonization**

The story of Hong Kong's complex identity began in 1842. Under the Treaty of Nanking, Hong Kong Island was surrendered from China to the United Kingdom marking the beginning of the city's complex international and colonial experience. In 1860, the Kowloon Peninsula and Stonecutters island were further ceded to British control. Finally, in 1898, the New Territories and Hong Kong's outlying islands were temporarily leased from China to Britain for 99 years until 1997. The finite nature of the New Territories lease triggered new considerations over Hong Kong's identity, exacerbated by Britain's loosening grip on most of its colonies worldwide. By the 1970s, serious negotiations began over the future status of Hong Kong, as the idea of keeping Hong Kong Island under British control while returning the leased New Territories back to China was both unlikely and impractical (Lilley 163). Since most of Hong Kong's industrial complexes were located in the New Territories, the return of the island back to China would provoke land and natural resources scarcity that would seriously cripple the city-state. The British thus decided that Hong Kong would benefit by remaining a cohesive entity after 1997. When the United Nations General Assembly finally passed the resolution of removing Hong Kong and Macau as colonies in 1972, discussions over Hong Kong's handover process began to take on full effect.

In 1979, Hong Kong governor Murray MacLehose met with Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping to begin discussions over Hong Kong's sovereignty. On the British side, MacLehose

argued for the entirety of Hong Kong, including the New Territories and outlying islands, to remain under British administration after 1997. Deng Xiaoping, on the other hand, asserted the necessity of Hong Kong to return to China, due to the city having made risky loans that could only be backed by the Chinese Government. Deng argued that large-scale infrastructure projects such as Hong Kong's subway MTR system required Beijing's support. Deng thus proposed an arrangement with the British government to give Hong Kong a special status under Chinese rule (Zhang 57-66). MacLehose's visit to Beijing alarmed the British of the looming issue of Hong Kong's contentious sovereignty, as well as China's intent of resuming rulership over the region. Britain's faltering grip over the city pushed them to continue negotiations with China in hopes to retain some British influence in Hong Kong's future. The continued bickering between two major political forces, and inability to make decisions over Hong Kong's future foreshadowed the fate of the city as a pawn in a China and Britain's battle for power.

### **Negotiations and the Two-legged Stool**

In 1982, three years after MacLehose's first visit to Beijing, the United Kingdom began to establish an understanding with China in Beijing's plans to reclaim Hong Kong. In a meeting with British envoy Edward Heath, Deng outlined his plan to make Hong Kong a special economic zone, which would allow the city to retain its free-market system despite being under Chinese sovereignty (Zhang 54). However, in allowing Hong Kong to have these freedoms, Deng emphasized the lack of room for compromise in his proposal, citing the unfairness of the original Treaty of Nanking that placed Hong Kong into the hands of Britain in the first place. Britain, who had also stood stubbornly by their beliefs, re-emphasized the validity of the original

treaties of Nanking, asserting that China needed to respect the treaties on universal terms. Despite the two sides disagreeing, Beijing's strong stance ultimately triumphed, pushing the British to begin formal negotiations over Hong Kong that would change the city's political landscape forever.

Issues regarding Hong Kong's governance and democratic stability can thus be traced back to these negotiations between Britain and China. Despite the importance of these discussions, only Chinese and British governments were present at the negotiating table to determine Hong Kong's sovereign future. Governor Youde, a British councilman stationed in Hong Kong, had declared his intention to represent the city's population during these discussions. However, Beijing was furious with this proposal, with Deng denouncing the idea of the "three-legged stool" in the negotiation process. Beijing emphasized that issues over Hong Kong's territory did not need the input of three parties. Instead, Deng argued that Hong Kong's viewpoint could be handled by China asserting that the city's experience was a part of "the common aspirations of the Chinese People". Thus, Deng maintained that there "should not be three legs, only two legs" in the negotiation process (Yeung). Deng's decision, left unchallenged by the British, completely shut out Hong Kong in discussions regarding the city's future. In the same way that China refused to honor the Nanking Treaties, and in the same way that the British exercised colonial force over the region, both nations undermined Hong Kong's political agency by refusing to recognise the validity of the city's Legislative Council ('LegCo' in short). Thus, the exclusion of Hong Kong in these negotiations to determine the special administrative region's future left the city in a vulnerable political state even before its handover.

As negotiations continued, The British government proposed to transform Hong Kong into a British nation with Chinese administration rather than to give the city completely over to Chinese sovereignty. Beijing refused, claiming that the ideas of administration and sovereignty were inseparable. The inability for both sides to come to an agreement escalated tensions until the Chinese government finally declared an ultimatum; the British government had to give up its position in Hong Kong or else Beijing would publicly announce its resolution of Hong Kong as one under unilateral Chinese sovereignty (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC). As a result of China's threats, in 1983, the British government expressed their willingness to explore arrangements optimizing the future of Hong Kong while accounting for China's proposals. Most significantly, in 1993, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher recognized Chinese sovereignty in Hong Kong's future, which she highlighted in her letter to Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang:

*"... provided that an agreement can be reached between the two sides on administrative arrangements for Hong Kong to guarantee the future prosperity and stability of Hong Kong, (...) I would be prepared to recommend to the Parliament that sovereignty over the entire Hong Kong would be returned to China."* (Thatcher)

Thatcher's letter, in addition to both governments' willingness to press forward with the issue of Hong Kong's sovereignty, led to a second round of meetings between the two nations from 1983 to 1984. These meetings cleared most tensions between the two nations by showing British sincerity in discussing China's proposal of Hong Kong's status as a special economic zone (Wu 11-17).

Just as the atmosphere of the negotiations were beginning to look stable, members of Hong Kong's Legislative Council announced that they had felt blindsided by the nature of the

long-running secrecy of the Sino-British negotiations over Hong Kong. Legislator Roger Lobo declared that it is “*essential that any proposals for the future of Hong Kong should be debated in this [Hong Kong Legislative] Council before agreement is reached*”. (Scott 207-212). Despite the Hong Kong Legislative Council’s unanimous pass of a motion to vote on future handover proposals, the Chinese Communist Party attacked the motion furiously. China referred to Hong Kong’s democratic ruling as “*attempt to play the three-legged stool trick again*”, and refused to acknowledge the outcome. Even though Hong Kong’s government tried to democratically become a part of the decision making process to determine the future of their own city, China and Britain still were the sole decision makers in laying the foundation for Hong Kong’s future. Therefore, since the beginning of Hong Kong’s conception as a special administrative region, the city-state was powerless over the control of its own identity and future.

### **The Joint Declaration**

After two years of negotiations, the Sino-British Joint Declaration was finally signed on December 19th 1984 by the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang. The two governments concluded that The People’s Republic of China would reassume control of Hong Kong from July 1st 1997 onwards. On June 12th 1985, the Joint Declaration was registered by both governments at the United Nations. It’s purpose was to bind both sides to the later established Basic Law in order to solidify the administration process of a post-handover Hong Kong. The Joint Declaration thus aimed to provide clarity that the emerging Hong Kong would be recognizably the same place before and after 1997 (Buckley 105).

A key problem with the Joint Declaration is that issues of importance were avoided in the declaration's drafting process, which would later cause complications for Hong Kong citizens and their identity. Firstly, the sensitive area of national identity was left unaddressed in the Joint Declaration. As a part of preparations for the handover, the issue of whether Hong Kong citizens would be considered British, Chinese, or Hong Kong nationals proved uncertain. This issue of identity was only later solved through an exchange of memorandum devices between the British and the Chinese. This memorandum, which was deliberately excluded from the original Joint Declaration, stated that:

*“Under the Nationality Law of the People's Republic of China, all Hong Kong Chinese compatriots, whether they are holders of the 'British Dependent Territories Citizens' Passport' or not, are Chinese nationals.”*

This distinction meant that over 40% of the population who possessed documents as British Dependent Territories' citizens would no longer have the right of permanent residency in Britain after 1997 (Buckley 117). The experience of the Hong Kong identity has thus been one of chaos and schizophrenia. Hong Kong citizens had already been stripped of their Chinese citizenship during the British occupation. The handover forced citizens to switch their national alliances yet again, abruptly denying many who had only experienced lives under a British colony of their commonwealth identities. China's eradication of Hong Kong citizens' nationalities, and explicitly stating that those who didn't have British citizenships were then after Chinese nationals, infringes on the legitimacy of the Hong Kong citizens' unique experience since the handover.



In addition to the issues of national identity, the vague and false promises made in the Joint Declaration put Hong Kong in a vulnerable position in terms of British and Chinese accountability. Thatcher had assured Hong Kong citizens that the United Kingdom would take issue with any breaches of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, guaranteeing Hong Kong's Legislative Council that "*Britain has the right to raise any breaches with China after 1997. We would not hesitate to do so*" (Hing 12). Such promises at the time made Hong Kong citizens feel safer during their transition back to China. However, this statement would not hold the test of time, as Britain continued to be politically distant as years progressed. Additionally, China stated in the Joint Declaration that it would allow Hong Kong to "*remain basically unchanged for 50 years*" (Hing 13). Hong Kong citizens believed that this clause implied that the city would retain a high degree of autonomy as a special administrative region, and that China would honor the city's independent legal and judicial system for 50 years (Cheung). These clauses would go on to live deeply in the hearts of Hong Kong citizens, who at the time were confident that the democratic values that were ingrained into Hong Kong's society would continue to live on. However, the vague nature of these clauses would eventually create space for growing Chinese infringement pushing for an open interpretation of the Joint Declaration that would ultimately allow Beijing's control to enter Hong Kong's politics.

Finally, a vague clause in the Joint Declaration regarding the election of the city's Chief Executive would ultimately contribute to Hong Kong's pro-democracy protesting culture. As a result of the negotiations between 1982 and 1984 over the future of Hong Kong, the Chinese leadership seemed to promise the Hong Kong community a system of self-governance. The Hong Kong government pledged its Green Paper of July 1984 that:

*“to develop progressively a system of government the authority for which is firmly rooted in Hong Kong, which is able to represent authoritatively the people of Hong Kong and which is more directly accountable to the people of Hong Kong.”* (Green Paper).

This decision satisfied many Hong Kong advocates of democracy at the time, as they saw the special administrative region as a system that would give democratic power to the people.

However, this clause in the Joint Declaration lacks concrete descriptions as to what kind of electoral system leadership would be put in place. The vague nature of the Green Paper meant that Chinese influence in Hong Kong had the potential of being substantial rather than symbolic. The Joint Declaration’s uncertainties regarding Chief Executive elections would later exacerbate the Basic Law’s vague coverage of universal suffrage (J. Cheng 443-444). While the Joint Declaration provided a baseline affirmation for liberal policies in Hong Kong society, its larger issues of vague democratic promises would ultimately expose the flaws of the special administrative region’s political foundations.

### **The Basic Law**

Shortly after the Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed in 1984, the National People’s Congress of China set up the Basic Law Drafting Committee (BLDC). The BLDC was responsible for creating Hong Kong’s constitution for the 50 years following the 1997 handover. During the Basic Law’s drafting process, Hong Kong people’s involvement was greatly limited. China took control of approving the BLDC membership list, which consisted of only 23 Hong Kong citizens in comparison with the 36 members from China. The inequality in decision-making power was further aggravated by the chair of the BLDC being a Chinese diplomat. In order to pretend that they were keeping Hong Kong’s perspective in consideration,

the BLDC sought collective opinions from Hong Kong citizens through the Basic Law Consultative Committee (BLCC), a group made up of Hong Kong community leaders. In reality, the BLCC was only consulted twice. This rendered the public consultations with the BLCC nothing more than a publicity stunt, meaning Hong Kong people's voices were barely accounted for in the construction of their own constitution.

As the drafting of the Basic Law continued, Chinese officials began hinting that they would prefer to see minimal change to Hong Kong's existing constitutional system. This was backed by their belief that the strong state presence formed the foundation of Hong Kong's stability and prosperity. By early 1988, it had become clear that the majority of the Basic Law Drafting Committee favoured an executive led government with the power concentrated around the Chief Executive. This in itself was set up to doom Hong Kong in its democratic future. Only 24 out of 56 seats in the Legislative Council were set up to be electable seats, with the remaining 32 to be appointed. Additionally, a majority of the constitutional power was set to be given to the Chief Executive. Hong Kong thus developed a political system that looked much more like a centralist autocratic regime than a functional democracy (J. Cheng 445). Voting power and decision making regarding Hong Kong's law was ultimately removed from the city's inhabitants. Therefore, the Chinese Communist Party was a major influence in establishing political instability in Hong Kong through manipulating the city's Basic Law.

Approval of the Basic Law was finally completed in April 1990. When the law was published, it became evident that the language used in the legislation created a vague foundation that would eventually delegitimize the city's democratic identity. The Basic Law's lack of clarity in describing the election of the Chief Executive was a core contributor to Hong Kong's

democratic backsliding in both 2014 and 2019. For example, the Basic Law's outline for the choice of Hong Kong's Chief Executive states that:

*The method for selecting the Chief Executive shall be specified in the light of the actual situation in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and in accordance with the principle of gradual and orderly progress. The ultimate aim is the selection of the Chief Executive by universal suffrage upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee in accordance with democratic procedures.*

This clause highlights the major flaw in the Basic Law. It specifically states that the matter should be decided at a later date, leaving excessive room for misinterpretation and undermining. Additionally, using words such as “*the ultimate aim*” to describe the achievement of universal suffrage without providing a working timeline or constructive way to achieve that goal leaves the issue of voting to become increasingly uncertain over time. The core issue of both the Joint Declaration and Basic Law therefore lies in the fact the British and the Chinese left some of the most critical issues regarding Hong Kong's future to be unresolved. This ultimately allowed the ambiguities of the constitution to spiral out of control as time unfolded, and created a prime environment for political volatility in the twenty-first century.

### **Ambiguities and Unresolved Issues**

As a result of the hasty implementation of the Joint Declaration and Basic Law by the British and Chinese governments, Hong Kong's core political structure was flawed since its inception. This study argues that the unilateral process of establishing Hong Kong's constitution, as well as the vague content of the legislations themselves, have gone on to influence the causes, processes, and outcomes of both the 2014 Umbrella Movement and 2019 AntiELAB Protests.

The ambiguities and unresolved issues of the Basic Law and Joint Declaration have thus exacerbated political uncertainty in Hong Kong even decades after the handover.

Firstly, the two-legged stool approach to policy making resulted in the implementation of weak policies that acted as landmines in Hong Kong's political system 20 years later. As mentioned earlier, the British and Chinese governments were the sole decision makers in the crafting of the city's Joint Declaration and Basic Law. China explicitly expunged Hong Kong citizens' opinion from the drafting process using the two-legged-stool argument. Such biased decision-making inflamed clauses in the Basic Law such as "The Hong Kong people will be under the authority of the Central People's Government of China". This language ultimately provided constitutional backing for infringing LegCo's power in their ability to protect the rights of Hong Kong citizens. Therefore the law-making that established Hong Kong as a special administrative region fundamentally undermined the legitimacy and durability of the city state's unique political status. This ultimately led to the democratic backsliding and political unrest experienced in both 2014 and 2019.

Secondly, the rushed nature of drafting the Joint Declaration and Basic Law resulted in a severely unorganized and insufficient execution of both documents. The British and Chinese governments lacked the time to solve the deep and complex issues that needed to be addressed in Hong Kong's transition from a British colony to a special administrative region under Beijing's control. The fifteen years spanning the Joint Declaration discussion period were largely dominated by debates over Hong Kong's future, rather than the more important aspects on how those changes would be implemented and at what pace. Pressing issues such as potential remedies addressing the long-term deficiencies of both documents were barely taken into

consideration. With the handover date of 1997 looming in front of them, the Chinese and British governments were forced to create laws that were vague and provisional. This would result in the laws' flexible interpretations by the Hong Kong government in the future, ultimately leading to the implementation of contentious bills such as the 2014 Consultation Document on the Methods for Selecting the Chief Executive and the 2019 Extradition Bill. The Chinese and British unwillingness to work through the complexities of a handover clause, as well as their reluctance to examine the intricate political circumstances that Hong Kong would potentially have to experience, were principal reasons for Hong Kong's continued civil unrest. Government incompetence and rushed decision-making are therefore two of the unresolved legacies that has become a root cause for political fragility in Hong Kong.

Thirdly, the joint declaration lacks follow-up signposts in most of its agreements. International and domestic politics are subject to insurmountable changes, especially as economies modernize and global landscapes adjust. With Hong Kong, China, and The United Kingdom continuously developing, all of these nations' relationships with each other and the rest of the world were bound to change. Changes in the political needs for citizens of a multinational city-state such as Hong Kong in the fifty year period between 1997 and 2047 should have been anticipated by British and Chinese policymakers. Additionally, international shocks such as political uprisings, international diseases, and other disruptive conflicts should have been foreseen in the Basic Law. Unlike most government policies which have adaptations made to it as modernization takes place, Hong Kong's Joint Declaration and Basic Law did not include any capacity for signposting or adjustments. This is particularly important as the relationships between Britain, China and Hong Kong should have been predicted to change frequently and

drastically. Therefore, the Joint Declaration and Basic Law only reflect the realities of 1980s politics, which even by the time of the handover in 1997 was outdated. Hong Kong's founding legislations are thus unreliable documents for Hong Kong citizens to rely on in the long-term.

Fourthly, the Joint Declaration lacks the language to describe consequences if either the United Kingdom or China doesn't abide by its commitments and goals. There is thus no way for the Chinese and British governments to be kept accountable. Clauses such as how Hong Kong which "*will remain basically unchanged for 50 years*", or that Hong Kong's politics will be "*a system of government the authority for which is firmly rooted in Hong Kong*" means nothing if they cannot be enforced, particularly if the enforcing parties have no real incentive to see such promises go through. Great Britain's increasing distance from Hong Kong's political landscape fails to keep the colonizing nation responsible for the policies it helped implement. There is no legislation in place to guarantee Britain's pledges to Hong Kong as the city transferred back to China. Additionally, China's slow encroachment on Hong Kong's political and economic landscape has spread fears regarding Beijing's lack of commitment to its promises over Hong Kong's democracy and autonomy. Under the Joint Declaration, China is supposed to allow Hong Kong to exist in its unique way of life until 2047. However there is a lack of clear language to prevent Beijing from intervening in the special administrative region leading up to that date. Therefore, even though the Joint Declaration and Basic Law were signed and guaranteed by both Britain and China, there are no real incentives for either nations to comply with their promises or ensure Hong Kong's political sanctity.

Finally, one of the biggest unresolved issues regarding the Joint Declaration and Basic Law is that despite Hong Kong's designated limited time as a special administrative region, there

is no written roadmap of how it would exist beyond 2047. While Britain and China had a vague understanding that Hong Kong would be handed completely back to China in 2047, in 1997, this seemed far away. As a result, Chinese and British officials failed to make a long-term plan in the Basic Law about Hong Kong's transition back to China. They failed to consider that Hong Kong's identity as a special administrative region would only heighten, with an entire generation growing up under a liberal democracy. Without considering a roadmap for transition, Hong Kong's long-term political landscape was bound to be fragile, with a social environment that was doomed to eventually burst. The issue of a temporary political climate that is set to fundamentally shift by predetermined date puts into danger generations of Hong Kong citizens who are accustomed to a certain democratic way of life. With the fear that those rights will disappear in the blink of an eye and no reassurance of what comes next, Hong Kong's society is left with a constant state of social and political unease. As these emotions burst uncontrollably with the right trigger pulled, it creates chaos in its wake as demonstrated by the 2014 and 2019 protests. China and Britain's incompetency in creating a long-run plan through the Joint Declaration and Basic Law thus highlights the fundamental issue of the finite political regime of 'one-country two systems'.

### **From 1997 to 2014**

The flaws of the Joint Declaration and Basic Law gradually became apparent following Hong Kong's handover, leading up to the 2014 Umbrella Movement and 2019 AntiELAB Protests. The large-scale demonstrations in 2014 and 2019 were no accidents. These movements can be understood as explosions of built-up tension and discontent leading up to Hong Kong's



political unravelling. As a result of Beijing's increasing attempts to control Hong Kong, Britain's inability to enforce democratic legal terms, and the incapacity of the Hong Kong government to adjust accordingly, problems began to emerge in the special administrative region.

In 2001, Hong Kong's Chief Secretary Anson Chan, one of the main figures in the Hong Kong government to oppose Chinese interference in the territory's affairs, was forced to resign under pressure from Beijing. He was replaced by Donald Tsang, a prominent pro-Beijing figure ("Hong Kong Profile - Timeline"). This signalled red flags regarding the sanctity of Hong Kong's status as a region supposedly independent of Beijing's control. In 2003, Hong Kong released proposals for Article 23 in the Basic Law, which stated that "*any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government*" would be prohibited (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region). The proposal increased anxiety over Hong Kong's lawful independence just six years after its handover. While the proposal was later shelved indefinitely as a result of city-wide marches, the government made it clear to citizens that Article 23 was not completely disposed of, furthering concerns of democratic backsliding in the region.

Additionally, in 2004, Beijing passed a law that stated Hong Kong's Legislative Council had to seek approval from the Chinese Central Government to enlist any changes to Hong Kong's laws. This gave Beijing the right to veto any moves that Hong Kong made towards increased democracy ("Hong Kong Profile - Timeline"). While Britain accused China of interfering with Hong Kong's constitutional reform process and self-governance guarantees, the British failed to enforce any rules that would change Beijing's decision. In 2007, Beijing announced that they would allow the people of Hong Kong to directly elect their own leadership in 2017, as well as their own legislators in 2020. However, pro-democracy activists expressed

their disappointment in the protracted timeline of achieving universal suffrage and the lack of accountability on Beijing's side. This announcement would later trigger the 2014 Umbrella Movement. Furthermore, in 2009, Hong Kong authorities proposed a political reform to expand its Legislative Council body, arguing it would ensure greater democracy in the region. Pro-democracy activists criticized this move as it did not make any adjustments to increase the collective power of individual Hong Kong citizens ("Hong Kong Profile - Timeline"). Rather, this ruling was seen as an extension of pro-Beijing members' powers within the Legislative Council.

This study argues that the contents of the Joint Declaration and Basic Law set up Hong Kong for a state of political dissatisfaction and unrest. Since its handover in 1997, Hong Kong citizens have become increasingly frustrated with the weak foundations of their city. They continue to find themselves vulnerable and unable to negotiate their way into securing basic democratic rights or protections under their rule of law. The British and the Chinese governments' hasty decision making before the handover ultimately left some of the most critical issues unresolved. Thus, the flaws in Hong Kong's early policymaking aggregated and finally became alarmingly apparent during both the 2014 and 2019 protests. With a broken system, an inability to hold those in power accountable, Hong Kong citizens found the only way they could fight for their futures was to take to the streets and protest for their freedom.

### **2014 Umbrella Movement**

The Umbrella Movement was a series of pro-democracy demonstrations that emerged in Hong Kong in mid-2014. Its name was inspired by activists' use of umbrellas as a tool for

peaceful resistance against the Hong Kong Police Force's use of pepper spray to disperse the crowds during the 79-day occupation of the city.

### Demands of the Protesters

The movement began as a reactionary protest against a contentious announcement made by the Hong Kong's National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC). On August 31st 2014, The NPCSC determined that while Hong Kong citizens could vote for their own Chief Executive in 2017 as promised, they could only do so on the condition that the candidates would be nominated by the Hong Kong government. Front runners had to thus first be approved by a nominating committee that was disproportionately made up of pro-Beijing members. Pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong criticized this decision as a betrayal of the "one person, one vote" promise made by Beijing during the handover. The NPCSC ruling was widely seen as a restrictive policy tantamount to the Chinese Communist Party's pre-screening of Chief Executive candidates in the supposedly democratic Hong Kong (Sales). As a result, protesters took to the streets demanding the right to vote for their own Chief Executive through full universal suffrage. Protesters demanded full accountability on Beijing's 2007 promise that Hong Kong citizens would be allowed to directly elect their own leadership by 2017. Therefore, the push for Hong Kong citizens' right to a "high degree of autonomy" and universal suffrage formed the motivational basis for the 2014 Umbrella Movement.

### How the Protests Unfolded

On September 22nd, isolated street protests began to mobilise in Hong Kong's financial district. Over 13,000 students and participants took to the streets, protesting the government's August 31st decision under the peaceful movement labeled 'Occupy Central with Love and

Peace’. Adorning themselves in yellow ribbons and black T-shirts, students from more than twenty universities gathered in front of the Chinese University of Hong Kong to protest against the NPCSC rejection of universal suffrage (Connors).

On September 28th, events began escalating. As a reaction to the police’s use of force against peaceful protesters, thousands of students and citizens surrounded the Central Government Complex. As the day progressed, these crowds began to spread into major traffic intersections in Hong Kong’s city-center, bringing the city to standstill. Protesters became increasingly aggravated as police attempted to block roads and bridges leading into the Central Government Complex. As tensions rose, police tried to contain the demonstrators by attacking crowds with tear gas. This attracted even more supporters to the streets, many of whom carried umbrellas to deflect the tear gas attacks. As support for the movement grew, Central’s roads began overflowing. Soon after, instead of occupying just Central, protesters began occupying the streets of Causeway Bay and Mongkok, transforming the movement to a larger call for political action under the term ‘Umbrella Movement’ (Chan 576).

Despite heightened calls for the NPCSC to withdraw its August decision, the Hong Kong government responded to the protests with a firm stance. In early October, the NPCSC publicly argued that their proposed electoral process complied with Hong Kong’s Basic Law, and thus civic nomination was not on the table. They cited Article 45 of the Basic Law which stated that the ultimate aim was for Hong Kong to achieve “*universal suffrage upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee*” (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region). The Hong Kong government argued that this meant pre-approved election candidates were constitutional, and that the form of universal suffrage that Hong Kong citizens were protesting

for contradicts the Basic Law. Therefore, the debate between the government and Hong Kong's protesting population tied back to the central flaw of Hong Kong's constitution. The vague nature of the Basic Law ultimately left room for politically motivated interpretations of the legislation, which resulted in the infringement of Hong Kong citizens' democratic values.

As the Umbrella Movement entered its second month of protests, the disruption of main roads had caused considerable inconvenience to the public, leading to an increased sense of dissatisfaction amongst the wider population. The government finally decided to meet with students on October 21st. During the meeting, the students made clear their new demands: 1) for the government to withdraw the August decision, 2) to endorse civic nomination for universal suffrage and free civic elections, 3) the abolition of functional constituencies, and finally 4) a clear timeline to achieve these demands (Chan 578). The Hong Kong government responded by offering to submit a report to Beijing's central government expressing Hong Kong's public sentiment, and work towards constitutional reform after 2017 (Chan). However, Beijing never publicly responded to any of the protesters' demands. These empty actions by the Hong Kong politicians were thus rejected by the public as being non-committing and vague, leading to students and activists to continue occupying major areas throughout Hong Kong.

After two and a half months of the city-wide occupation, growing fatigue amongst protesters began to grow. It became difficult to sustain the Umbrella Movement due to the public inconvenience caused by blocking the city's main roads. The movement began to lose public support. By early December, a little under three months after the Occupy Central Movement began, major roads reverted back to bustling highways and students returned to their university campuses. Without much change enacted in the electoral or democratic process of Hong Kong,

protesters stopped taking to the streets and gave up on their movement. Without an economic motive or political threat, Beijing had little incentive to grant Hong Kong residence universal suffrage. The government simply had to wait until everything settled down (Connors). By the morning of December 11th, only sixteen tents were left sitting idly in Hong Kong's central financial district. That afternoon, within 30 minutes of the police arriving, the last tent was pulled down, permanently halting the Umbrella Movement once and for all. The public's heavy activism against the government ultimately subsided, with no drastic political or democratic goals achieved.

### Outcomes of the Protests

The 2014 Umbrella Movement marked a fundamental shift in Hong Kong citizens' attitudes towards democracy. While the Hong Kong government proposed changes that would allow residents to vote directly for their Chief Executive, the fact that the candidates had to be chosen by a CCP-majority nominating committee was seen as a major infringement on citizens' democratic rights (Buckley). The movement had been an awakening for many Hong Kong citizens. Many young people who weren't interested in politics prior to the Umbrella Movement became more motivated to engage in activism and make their voices heard. In the end, the subservience and passiveness that protesters were so proud of during the Umbrella Movement led them nowhere.

A year after the protests in April 2015, the Hong Kong government formally announced its proposal for a new voting system, ignoring the Umbrella Movement's calls for a more democratic electoral process. Demands for a direct election of Hong Kong's leader from 2014 were formally rejected and it was announced that a committee would choose the Chief Executive

candidates. The failed outcome of the 2014 Umbrella Movement would thus linger in pro-democracy activists' hearts for the years to come, only to reignite in a much different light during the 2019 AntiELAB Protests.

### **2019 Anti-Extradition Law and Bill Protests**

While the 2014 protests did not help Hong Kong citizens achieve universal suffrage, the Umbrella Movement has had lasting rippling effects; one of which is the endurance and resolve that has fueled the 2019 AntiELAB Movement.

#### **Demands of the Protesters**

The 2019 Anti Extradition Law and Bill Movement was spurred by the Hong Kong government's February 12th announcement of its plan to amend the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance. This amendment would allow the Hong Kong government to surrender convicted criminals to countries that the city did not have bilateral extradition agreements with. Amongst these nations were China, Taiwan, and Macau. While the Hong Kong government argued this law to be a reaction against the murder of Hong Kong citizen by her boyfriend during their 2018 vacation in Taiwan (F. Lee 2), many Hong Kong citizens saw the bill as an infringement on their democratic rights and a threat to their personal safeties. In particular the law proved problematic as Hong Kong citizens would be allowed to be extradited to mainland China where the legal systems are much more ambiguous and exploitative compared to Hong Kong. The Extradition Bill thus provoked strong public concerns towards the Chinese and Hong Kong governments' political motivations.

As a response to the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance amendment, protesters demanded that Chief Executive Carrie Lam fully withdraw the Extradition Bill from the public. Initially, Lam refused to make accommodations over the bill. As protests escalated, on June 15th, Lam was forced to announce the suspension of the Extradition Bill. However, this was not a full withdrawal. As a response, protesters issued five ultimatums, pushing for “five demands and not one less”. These five demands were: 1) the complete withdrawal of the Extradition Bill from the legislation, 2) a retraction of the "riot" characterisation of the protests, 3) the release and exoneration of arrested protesters, 4) an establishment of an independent commission of inquiry into police conduct and use of force during the protests, and finally 5) the resignation of Carrie Lam and the implementation of universal suffrage (Hsu). These five demands would continue to inform the basis for the AntiELAB Movement throughout the rest of 2019.

#### How the Protests Unfolded

The exact start date of the AntiELAB Movement is not entirely clear. However, from the day of the Extradition Law’s announcement in February, pro-democracy activists had been steadily on the rise. On March 31st, the Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF), comprising dozens of Hong Kong’s pro-democracy groups, called for the first protest against the Extradition Bill. Thousands of activists marched to the government headquarters in Admiralty calling for the amendment to be retracted. On April 28th, a second protest was called by the CHRF, attracting more than 100,000 citizens to march outside LegCo. Despite these persistent demonstrations, the Hong Kong government continued with their plans to execute the Extradition Bill.

On June 9th, three days before the second reading of the bill, the AntiELAB Movement came into full force. Amid heavy police presence, one million citizens attended a peaceful march



protesting the Extradition Bill, making the June 9th's demonstration the largest ever mass-protest in Hong Kong's history. On June 12th, the day of the intended second reading, tens of thousands of citizens continued to surround the Hong Kong LegCo building, preventing LegCo members from entering. Activists on the streets felt as if their rights as citizens were being taken away from them, with many expressing their concerns of the lack of transparency regarding the Extradition Bill's execution. The infringement on Hong Kong citizens' rights again, only five years after the Umbrella Movement, left the people of Hong Kong desperate to save the democratic future of their city.

On June 13th, one day after the originally scheduled second Extradition Bill court meeting, protesters successfully obstructed LegCo members from resuming the Extradition Bill reading again. As a response, Carrie Lam called on the Hong Kong police to disperse the protesters. Nevertheless, demonstrations continued in the following three days to prevent court proceedings. However, unlike the generally peaceful 2014 protest, excessive violent methods were enacted by the Hong Kong Police Force against protesters in their attempts to curb anti-government sentiments. Police indiscriminately fired tear gas into crowds, shot rubber bullet rounds at illegal close ranges, and assaulted members of both the international and domestic press. Additionally, Police Commissioner Stephen Lo declared these clashes "riots". Under the riot classification, the police were permitted to deploy force against the citizens. Such outlandish actions by the police generated tensions between protesters and the government that would continue to fuel Hong Kong's divisive political atmosphere. Following continued police-protest clashes, protesters began calling for an independent inquiry into police brutality and pleaded for the government to remove the "riot" characterization. Despite a pro-establishment majority on

the LegCo, and the government's previous confidence about its ability to push the amendment past public opposition, Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam finally announced the suspension of the Extradition Bill on June 15th. However, since the law was not fully withdrawn, Hong Kong activists and protesters remained unsatisfied with this suspended state. The next day on June 16th, a reported two million citizens took to the streets (F. Lee 3) to demand "five demands and not one less".

By July, anti-protest groups began to retaliate against the AntiELAB Movement. Pro-Beijing citizens would wear white clothing and gather on the same streets, staging their own protests in support of the Chinese and Hong Kong governments. Many of these pro-Beijing groups would even run into AntiELAB protesters and actively get into physical fights with them. On July 21st, dozens of masked men stormed the train station in Yuen Long to attack commuting protesters. These masked figures were found to be members of local triads, and speculated to be hired by pro-Beijing groups for retaliation (Giles).

As months passed, the originally policy-oriented protest devolved into a summer of uprising and discontent in the special administrative region. As the more centrist protesters re-oriented themselves back to their daily routines, populists and extremists were left to dominate the AntiELAB Protests. Black-clad protesters took to the streets, defaced public properties, set fires to trains, cut up traffic wires, dug up bricks from the sidewalk, and destroyed businesses linked to pro-Beijing figures. This extremist devolvement of the protests generated growing public resentment towards the movement. Many Hong Kong citizens felt increasingly distant from the AntiELAB Movement as businesses faltered and citizens were unable to return to work. On October 23rd, Carrie Lam finally announced a complete withdrawal of the Extradition Bill

from the legislative process. However, it was too late. Fear and fury had washed over the protesting population so much so that any government attempts to appease the population did not work. Hong Kong citizens' unwillingness to back down and their stamina to continue protesting proved just how desperate the population was to secure democratic and political safety for the city's future.

### Outcomes of the Protests

The continued escalation of violence between AntiELAB protesters, pro-Beijing groups, and riot police led Hong Kong's economy to plummet with many small businesses struggling to survive. Political polarization was steadily on the rise, with feelings of resentment left to fester in niches of the city. Despite the government attempting to take action through withdrawing the Bill and police control, there were still no signs of when and how the protests would end (F. Lee 3). The protests continued to wreak havoc in the city throughout the remainder of 2019. As January 1st 2020 rolled around, protests continued to dominate the streets. Hong Kong police arrested around 400 people after a pro-democracy New Year's Day march with tens of thousands of participants spiraled into chaos. January 1st marked 7,000 total arrests since June 2019, with no way of knowing how or when the movement would end.

The AntiELAB Protests have raised a series of questions regarding Hong Kong's future of democracy and its status as a special administrative region. The rise of radicalization, collective action, and innovative strategies in the 2019 protests were starkly different to the previous 2014 Umbrella Movement. While the 2014 movement could be seen as a reaction against democratic backsliding, the AntiELAB Protests can be understood as an explosion of

built up frustration towards the Hong Kong government's inability to maintain a strong and fair rule of law to protect its citizens' rights.

The next part of this study will investigate the reasons as to why the 2014 and 2019 protests are inherently different. In particular, this study will explore five aspects of these protest movements: the trigger of the protests (which was briefly discussed in the two previous sections), the political circumstances of both protests, the socioeconomic environments, the influence of technology and media, and the types of protest methods used. Through these five lenses, this study will show how continued government failure in Hong Kong will only lead to further social uprisings unless democratic accountability can be finally reached. This study thus argues that the Hong Kong government must address the core underlying issues propelling the protests, in order to return the city to its former prosperous and peaceful environment.

## **Chapter 2: How the Protests Differed**

While Hong Kong's political history and foundations were instrumental in contributing to the city's vulnerabilities, it is also important to understand the circumstantial factors that affected the 2014 and 2019 protests' differing developments. Unlike the 2014 protests, the early stage Anti-ELAB protests drew many more participants than any pro-democracy movement in the past. Demonstrations also turned militant towards the end, filling Hong Kong's streets with fire and teargas. The escalation of radical activism, which led to increasingly violent protests in the final months of 2019, is an extraordinarily unique occurrence in Hong Kong's post-handover history.

This chapter will explore the core reasons as to why the 2019 AntiELAB Protests progressed much more tumultuously than the 2014 Umbrella Movement. This study looks at five key aspects to compare the 2014 and 2019 movements: 1) triggers of the protests, 2) the political circumstances of the protests, 3) the socioeconomic environment in which the protests happened 4) the technology and media landscapes of the protests, and 5) the differences in protest strategies. This study thus argues that the 2019 AntiELAB Movement was much more disorderly compared to the 2014 Umbrella Movement as a result of the faltering hope that citizens continue to have towards the future of democracy and freedom in the special administrative region.

### **Triggers of the Protests**

The triggers of both the 2014 and 2019 protests can be understood as a reaction against the flaws inherent in Hong Kong's legislation and law drafting process. On one hand, the 2014 Umbrella Movement was a result of the Basic Law's failure to specify details on achieving

universal suffrage. On the other hand, the 2019 AntiELAB Movement was a frustrated outburst against the government's lack of political protections for Hong Kong people despite their unique status as citizens of a special administrative region. The 2019 Extradition Bill therefore triggered a much more violent uprising throughout the city because citizens recognized just how much of a threat the law could pose on their long-term political safeties.

Unlike the 2019 protests, the 2014 Umbrella Movement lacked the same momentum and vigor that would have allowed the demonstrations to endure in the long-run. This can be attributed to the initial trigger of the 2014 movement being a retraction of a policy that was never fully enacted in the first place. Because universal suffrage had never actually been experienced in Hong Kong, many citizens didn't feel like the ruling posed an immediate threat to their livelihoods. The governments' screening of Chief Executive candidates didn't fundamentally change Hong Kong's status quo. Thus, protesters' anger was instead rooted in the idea of broken political promises and the lack of government accountability. While citizens were still enraged at Beijing's failure to follow through with their promise of democratic reform, the overall changes to the citizens' daily lives were not tangible enough to cause mass panic. This was unlike the 2019 AntiELAB Movement in which citizens felt their immediate public safety was being threatened by an existing policy being amended. Because citizens didn't feel like their livelihoods were being immediately threatened in 2014, the Umbrella Movement didn't deteriorate as rapidly as it did in 2019. As a result of a lack of urgency and faltering strength to push the movement forward, citizens simply stopped occupying the streets and returned to their regular lives after three short months of protesting. Thus, the lack of a perceived threat in 2014

contributed to the Umbrella Movement's early collapse and inability to push for political concessions.

Another reason why the 2014 Umbrella Movement was less sustained and less violent than in 2019 was because the original laws and announcements that triggered the AntiELAB Movement were disappointingly vague. Firstly, the outline for achieving universal suffrage in the Basic Law was unclear, and left many issues unresolved. This was a result of the hasty drafting process enacted by the British and Chinese governments. There are no tangible written or structural systems that states the Hong Kong government must establish full universal suffrage by a certain date. The Basic Law only highlights that *“the ultimate aim is the selection of the Chief Executive by universal suffrage”*, leaving the remaining questions of ‘when’ and ‘how’ to be unresolved (Hing 19). Beijing was thus not obliged to hold themselves accountable to their verbal promise of allowing full universal suffrage in Hong Kong by 2017. Secondly, the 2007 promise for universal suffrage was already weakened as a result of the pro-Beijing pandering that occurred during the law's drafting process. The Hong Kong government's pan-democratic party originally pushed for universal suffrage to be achieved by 2012. However, the pro-Beijing camp pushed for a starting year of 2017 instead. The NPCSC ultimately decided that universal suffrage elections would occur in 2017, pandering to the Chinese Central Government (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region). Additionally, during the ruling, the NPCSC highlighted that *“appropriate amendments (...) may be made to the specific method for selecting the fourth Chief Executive”* (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region). Thus, even while the NPCSC decided that universal suffrage would be utilized in 2017, they made it so the law could be subject to changes. The implication that amendments could be made to Hong Kong's planned universal

suffrage, while not limiting the type of amendments that could be executed, fundamentally undermines the democratic values of the voting system itself. As a result, when 2014 finally came around and Hong Kong began preparing for its election season, the NPCSC was able to act within its legal limits when requiring that chief executive candidates be nominated by a committee. Because the government felt they were not responsible for succumbing to protesters' demands, and felt protected by the policies put in place by the Basic Law, they were able to inhibit universal suffrage and increase democratic backsliding. Therefore, no matter how much protesters occupied streets and partook in city-wide marches, there was no incentive for the government to change their courses of action. Instead, all the Hong Kong government had to do was sit idly by and wait for the movement to subside.

Unlike the 2014 Umbrella Movement, the initial triggers of the 2019 AntiELAB Movement were perceived as much more of a threat, and thus contributed to the protests' prolonged and aggressive nature. The AntiELAB Protests were triggered by what Hong Kong citizens viewed as the government taking away their pre-existing fundamental democratic rights. The Extradition Bill, which could force suspected Hong Kong citizens to be tried under Beijing's legal systems, blurs the lines between Hong Kong and Beijing's rules of law. Many Hong Kong citizens saw this as an imminent threat to their sovereign political securities. Since 1997, Hong Kong's rule of law has always been regarded as fairly liberal and democratic, especially in comparison to that of mainland China. This has been particularly true considering the rise of Xi Jinping and his tightened authoritarian grip on the Chinese mainland. In the 2019 World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, Hong Kong ranked sixteenth globally, third in Asia, and even five places ahead of the United States (J. Wong). The city's supposedly strong legal system which



protects each citizen's freedom of action and speech is what gave Hong Kong people a peace of mind after the handover. As a result, when this rule of law was threatened by an Extradition Bill, it sparked a violent and emotional response. Hong Kong citizens saw the Extradition Bill as robbing the city of their guaranteed political freedoms. The Hong Kong government's seeming neglect for the city's rule of law was further exacerbated by the way the authorities responded to demonstrators early in the protests. Many activists have pointed to police brutality, the authority's dangerous use of weaponry, and lack of accountability as similarities to the Chinese Communist Party's methods of state control (J. Wong). Thus, the government's sudden removal of Hong Kong citizens' basic protections through the Extradition Law and Bill, compounded with their execution of brute force to control the protesters was seen as an imminent threat to the special administrative region. As a result of the government's manipulation of the Basic law which eroded citizens' protections, the 2019 AntiELAB Protests degenerated into a chaotic mess that quickly spiraled out of control.

The Extradition Bill's undermining of Hong Kong citizens' identity as a separate state from the mainland was another trigger that caused the 2019 AntiELAB Movement to generate more fury and anger than the 2014 Umbrella Movement. The lack of government accountability in protecting Hong Kong citizens' democratic values was a driving factor that increased anxieties in the city, forcing the protests to devolve into an anti-establishment movement. Paul Shieh, former chairman of the Hong Kong Bar Association highlights this escalating fear by explaining that "it is difficult for Hong Kong citizens to visualize a state in which the rule of law exists in the absence of genuine democracy" (J. Wong). The Extradition Law not only pushes against the democratic identity of Hong Kong citizens that sets it apart from the autocratic mainland, but

also infringes upon the “one country, two systems” rule that China is required to abide by. The Western conception of freedom and democracy has been ingrained in Hong Kong society for more than a century under British colonial rule, and is a core component of Hong Kong’s identity. However, the political freedoms enjoyed by the people of Hong Kong is fragile, and can only be sustained if the government is both subject to the city’s laws, and held accountable by the citizens. As a result, the Extradition Bill has shown the Hong Kong people that their government can no longer be bound by their own regulations or citizens, igniting a much brighter flame to fuel the AntiELAB Movement. Hong Kong people’s determination to physically fight for their democracy and freedom is thus seen by protesters as the only way to protect the unique identity of what it means to be a Hong Konger.

### **Political Circumstances**

While 2014 and 2019 were only five years apart, it is important to recognize the differences in Hong Kong’s political climate to consolidate how these contexts affected the divergent development of the protests. China’s influence on Hong Kong and international politics has contributed to the volatile political climate that set the background to both protests. However, participants in the 2014 Umbrella Movement felt that they had a stronger sense of political security compared to 2019. The political circumstances leading up to 2014 allowed organizers to feel they could garner more public support and government acceptance, whereas in 2019 activists had lost hope in the governments’ willingness to acknowledge their demands. This in turn contributed to the AntiELAB protesters’ violent and aggressive behaviour compared to the relatively peaceful demonstrators of the Umbrella Movement.

Firstly, one of the reasons the 2014 Umbrella Movement was not as aggressive as the 2019 AntiELAB Movement was because it was one of the first instances in which Hong Kong citizens had experienced a genuinely contentious political ruling. Between 1997 and 2014, it is difficult to identify activities or actions taken by Beijing that directly infringed on the political freedoms of Hong Kong citizens. Prior to 2014, only a few pieces of legislation had caused dissatisfaction in Hong Kong. Similar to the trigger of the Umbrella Movement, these contentions involved the government's attempts to limit universal suffrage. For example, the 2005 'Protest for Democracy' and the 2010 'Marches for Universal Suffrage' were reactions against the governments' decision to uphold Hong Kong's electoral college rather than allow for citizens to directly vote for their leadership (Gunia). Because both these protests eventually pressured the government to publicly, yet vaguely, state their intention to install universal suffrage at some point in the future, the protesters assumed that this was the government agreeing to their demands, and thus deemed the demonstrations as a success. Protesters felt that their pleas had been understood by the Hong Kong administration, and thus didn't engage in any radical actions. Additionally, the Hong Kong government's track record prior to 2014 in dealing with crises were seen as generally applaudable. The Hong Kong government was widely praised for its careful management of the multiple pandemics, such as SARS and the Avian Influenza, that hit the region (A. Wong 101). They were also commended for their cautiousness in alleviating the Asian Financial crisis' impact on the city (Bloomberg). The Hong Kong government's competence in managing national emergencies thus further enhanced the perception that Hong Kong was in capable hands, and had a stable political environment. The 2014 Umbrella Movement was a fundamental shift from this previous political understanding.

Unlike earlier demonstrations that pushed for democratic voting in the near future, the Umbrella Movement was different as it protested the Hong Kong government's rollback on their promise of universal suffrage. Rather than pushing for democratic reform, the 2014 protesters were fighting against the infringement of already-existing egalitarian practises. As a result, while previous movements only drew a couple thousand street protesters, the 2014 Movement proved to be an anomaly rallying over 100,000 participants at its peak. The fact that the government had gone back on its promise was seen as a rare egregious action that could be circumvented by peaceful demonstrations. Therefore, political circumstances leading up to 2014 protests encouraged the assumption that the government would concede to civil disobedience. The 2014 Umbrella Movement's relatively peaceful progression can thus be partially attributed to Hong Kong citizens' perception of the city's generally stable political environment.

The relatively amicable relationship between China and the West was another key reason that the 2014 Umbrella Movement was much less violent than the 2019 AntiELAB Movement. In 2014, China's correspondence with the United States was not hostile, but cautiously collaborative. This meant that during the 2014 protests, activists on the ground had less encouragement or overt support from Western press, governments, and ideologies that could have propelled their rage into further action. This contrasts the 2019 protests in which China and the United States have become strongly antagonistic. The US-China trade war started by President Donald Trump in 2018 exacerbated the political and ideological differences between Beijing and Washington. Additionally, the anti-China economic and ideological sentiments in the West encouraged the 2019 AntiELAB Protests to be fueled by Western anti-Chinese values. Activists in 2019 were often captured waving American flags, engaging with Western reporters,

and spouting the same anti-Chinese rhetoric Trump has been widely criticized for (Bradsher). Unlike in 2019, protesters in 2014 rarely used political symbols or populist rhetoric from the West. This is because even though China and the United States were not allies at the time, the collaboration between the two nations was enough to avert an ideological war between them. Therefore, while some Western politicians did encourage Hong Kong citizens in their fight for universal suffrage in 2014 it did not promote the same populist-fuelled anti-Chinese rhetoric as it did in 2019. The 2014 Umbrella Movement protesters acted in a much more conservative manner as a result of moderate international political factors. Without the encouragement from the US-Chinese political and trade war to push activists to engage in radical actions, the protests ended up slowly subsiding and eventually fizzled out.

Another reason the 2014 Umbrella Movement was more effectively managed than the 2019 AntiELAB Movement, was because of the difference in Hong Kong's leadership. Hong Kong's Chief Executive CY Leung responded with political dexterity to the Umbrella Movement compared to Carrie Lam's incompetent reaction in the initial rounds of the AntiELAB Protests. CY Leung's close relationship with Beijing informed his political judgement and reactions to the protests. This ultimately helped him enforce the conservative trajectory of the 2014 Umbrella Movement. Unlike Carrie Lam, CY Leung was quite favoured by the Chinese Communist Party. Leung proved loyal by siding with Beijing in several contentious cases such as reinforcing Beijing's rhetoric regarding the Tiananmen massacre, supporting projects to build more infrastructure linking Hong Kong with the mainland, as well as condemning the jailed Chinese dissident Liu Xiabo (Pomfret). As a result, when protests began escalating in 2014, CY Leung was confident that Beijing trusted him enough to responsibly deal with the Umbrella Movement.

Leung did not feel the need to prove his competence to the mainland by enacting fringe and risky policies (Chan). For example, only fairly late in the protests did Leung deploy a police force to quell protests. Even when he did so, he did not order violent action against the protesters, nor did he frame the protests as riots. CY Leung's level headed tactics allowed him to focus on quietly ushering protesters away, and waiting for the worst to blow over. By slowly and calmly picking off remaining stragglers when the Umbrella Movement began to subside, CY Leung was able to effectively extinguish the Umbrella Movement within three months. This contrasts Carrie Lam, who was a new figure in Hong Kong's political scene with shallow ties to Beijing. One of Lam's greatest shortcomings was that she felt she was not trusted by Beijing ("Lack of Legitimacy Will Hem in Hong Kong's New Leader"). As a result, Lam acted to please Beijing at the early stages of the protests, framing the initial peaceful marches as riots, calling on fully equipped riot police to subdue activists, and stubbornly continuing to push for the Extradition Bill. As protesters retaliated and the situation escalated, Lam grew more and more insecure about her position in Hong Kong, fearing Beijing's faltering faith in her. As a result, Lam felt she could not withdraw the Extradition Bill, possibly worrying it would expose her vulnerability to the Central Chinese Government. Because Lam continued to announce her stance to uphold the Extradition Bill, the angry protesters continued to rampage throughout Hong Kong. Carrie Lam's rash actions thus propelled Hong Kong citizens to engage in more violent and extreme acts as time progressed. By the time Lam finally withdrew the bill, it was too late. Protesters had already lost faith in the government and were incentivized to continue their acts of defiance and disruption. Therefore, Hong Kong's leadership capabilities were core contributing factors to the nature of the protests. Because CY Leung was more secure in his position in Beijing's eyes compared to Carrie Lam's

vulnerable disposition, Leung was able to carry out rational and level headed responses that quelled the 2014 Umbrella Movement with relative speed and order.

The rapid change in Hong Kong's political atmosphere between 2014 and 2019 was another contributing factor to the AntiELAB Movement's disorderly nature compared to the Umbrella Movement. 2019's political circumstances were much more volatile than that of 2014, marked by gradual erosions of political safety and freedoms, as demonstrated by several alarming events. As a reaction to the 2014 protests, Beijing increased its efforts to rein in political dissent in Hong Kong. One way the Chinese government did this was by kidnapping book publishers who were generating content that criticized members of the Chinese Communist Party. This kidnapping aggravated worries about freedom of speech and expression in Hong Kong. Between October and December 2015, five staff members of a Hong Kong book publishing house "Causeway Bay Books" were reported missing. The publishing firm had been known for producing books critical of Chinese government officials. However, such criticisms did not violate any Hong Kong laws and did not legally call for state-sanctioned punishments. While never officially revealed, it is widely suspected that the book publishers had been detained by Chinese authorities as a ploy by Beijing to control the narrative surrounding Xi Jinping's administration within Hong Kong (Jenkins). There is proof that at least two of the book publishers disappeared while travelling within mainland China. Another publisher disappeared in Hong Kong only to later reappear in the mainland without having the necessary travel documents necessary to have crossed the border through legal channels. Yet another publisher disappeared whilst on vacation in Thailand, again only to end up in the mainland (Jenkins). The unprecedented disappearance of people in Hong Kong came as a shock to most citizens, as the

city's rule of law had never permitted the Chinese Central Government to interfere so directly with Hong Kong residents' personal lives. The disappearances were an alarming infringement of several articles of the Basic Law regarding the principles of one country, two systems (Kellogg 1239) and fundamentally threatened Hong Kong's protection of its people from China's reach. The situation was further aggravated when Gui Minhai, one of the missing book publishers, made his first public reappearance through a confessional video. In the video broadcasted on Chinese national television, Gui insisted that his return to the mainland was voluntary. However, this was widely believed to be a forced statement due to Gui's disoriented speech pattern and failure to address his movements over national borders (Kellogg 1242). The Chinese Communist Party's manipulation of Hong Kong citizens' personal lives, undermining their freedoms of speech, and most importantly their personal safeties under the special administrative region's Basic Law thus alarmed the people of Hong Kong. Therefore the outlandish kidnapping of Hong Kong citizens by the Chinese government just after the 2014 Umbrella Movement promoted anxieties in Hong Kong regarding their political freedoms and safety leading up to 2019.

Increasing Chinese sharp power in Hong Kong is another key contributor to the increased anxieties experienced by Hong Kong citizens between 2014 and 2019. As highlighted by the National Endowment for Democracy in 2017, sharp power stems from national ideologies that promote state power over individual liberty. Sharp power policies are fundamentally hostile in practice. They involve intimidation, coercion, censorship, and manipulation in order to diminish the validity of the victim nation's institutions (Walker). As a reaction to the 2014 protests, Beijing used sharp power in attempts to expand its influence in Hong Kong, exercise stronger control in the region, and erode certain liberties in the region. Two examples of Chinese sharp



power in Hong Kong enacted between 2014 and 2019 include the barring of people's ability to insult the Chinese national anthem when played in the city, as well as the establishment of compulsory national education classes in Hong Kong public schools. The barring of criticisms of the Chinese national anthem through the National Anthem Bill on January 11th, 2019, was intended to preserve the dignity of the anthem and Chinese culture. However, most citizens believed the bill was enacted by Beijing in attempts to quell Hong Kong-mainland tension resulting from the 2014 Umbrella Movement. Following the 2014 protests, many Hong Kong citizens began to boo the national anthem when it was played at large gatherings, such as sports games. The Hong Kong national football team even booed the anthem during international football matches. While FIFA issued warnings to the Hong Kong Football Association, players continued to disrespect the anthem (Porteous). As a result, the Chinese Central Government extended the mainland's national anthem law to Hong Kong. Beijing argued that this new law would help foster "social values and patriotism in Hong Kong". Under the law, violators, including those who modified the anthem's lyrics, mock the song, or play it during "inappropriate" occasions could be detained up to 15 days under criminal prosecution. The NPCSC ultimately added the National Anthem Law to the Annex Section of the Basic Law of Hong Kong, which meant it became an official piece of local legislation (Pang). The implementation of the National Anthem Law to Hong Kong's Basic Law demonstrates China's problematic use of sharp power in the region. Beijing's enforcement of the mainland's nationalistic laws without Hong Kong citizens' consent, exacerbates the aggressive and subversive policies that are often weaponized by authoritarian governments to project their state power in democratic regions. Chinese sharp power thus encouraged anxieties over encroaching

Chinese control in Hong Kong, ultimately incentivizing Hong Kong citizens to want to fight harder and longer during the 2019 AntiELAB Protests.

Similarly, the Chinese government's persistent attempts to establish compulsory national education classes in the special administrative region proved alarming to many Hong Kong residents. Many concerned citizens saw Beijing's action as an encroachment of the mainland Chinese education system upon Hong Kong's independent schooling practices. In 2012, the Hong Kong administration was forced to shelve plans for a national education curriculum in local schools after massive public backlash. However, in 2017, the contentious issue was brought back to LegCo by Chief Executive Carrie Lam, who made the topic a top priority during her first month in office despite dissenting public opinions. Lam's administration had been outspoken about reforming education to "*instil patriotism in students*" (Pang). Lam's rhetoric has stoked fears among parents, educators, and students alike who worry that propagandistic education could permeate into Hong Kong schools. The biggest issue is the contents of the national education. Lam's administration promoted the idea for children, starting from kindergarten, to identify with the statement "I am Chinese". Lam argued that it would give students a stronger sense of Chinese national identity. However, this proved problematic as the issue exacerbated political tensions over the "one country, two systems" formula under which Hong Kong should be governed (P. Chiu). Under "one country, two systems", Hong Kong is supposed to be free to maintain its own identity, legal systems, and culture. Beijing's enforcement of a national education with heavy Chinese rhetoric would fundamentally shift Hong Kong's politics and society, thus infringing on the special administrative region status. As a result of Beijing's push for national education as a part of their coercive sharp power, Hong Kong citizens had begun

developing increasing negative sentiments towards the mainland. Therefore, high profile incidents such as kidnapping of book publishers, the national anthem law, and a city-wide push for educational reform has raised suspicions about Beijing's political intentions. This in turn has fuelled concerns about how much the Chinese Communist Party is willing to honor Hong Kong's way of life.

As a result of growing Chinese sharp power and increased political control in Hong Kong society, feelings of anxiety regarding democratic backsliding and a loss of agency slowly built up in the special administrative region. This ultimately contributed to growing anger and fears to permeate the city, ultimately leading to the explosion that was the 2019 AntiELAB Movement.

### **Socioeconomic Environments**

The deterioration of Hong Kong's socioeconomic environment in the last decade has been a main source of dissatisfaction amongst the city's population. The lack of change in inequality, increases in housing prices, and negative impacts on unemployment rates between the years 2014 and 2019 exposed the government's incompetence in addressing pressing issues in Hong Kong society. The frustrations of the working class who saw no improvement in their social and economic circumstances generated feelings of resentment that fueled the anti-government protests. This in turn contributed to the turbulent attitudes and actions displayed by demonstrators in the 2019 AntiELAB Protests compared to the 2014 Umbrella Movement.

One of the most prominent socioeconomic issues Hong Kong citizens encountered in 2014 was the inflated housing prices and declining ownership of private property. Happiness amongst Hong Kong youth has rapidly declined since the city's handover in 1997 as a result of

the inability for young citizens to find independence and be residentially mobile. According to a research project by Stephen Wing-kai Chiu and Kevin Tze-wai Wong, rapid economic growth and the rise in housing prices is positively correlated with the level of dissatisfaction towards Hong Kong's political climate. In their research, Chiu and Wong found that on average, people aged 18-30 years old had experienced a decrease in their happiness from 2.9 to 2.79 on a scale from 0 to 4 between the years 2000 and 2014. Hong Kong's slow economic recovery in the late 2000s meant that many young people who had just graduated from university faced low levels of employment as a result of a stagnant market. Because of the shifting business landscapes after the crisis, many recent graduates' degrees were also less competitive than anticipated, leaving many students either unemployed or with low paying jobs (261). As a result of Hong Kong's soaring housing prices and shortage in housing supply, more and more youth are also forced to continue living in cramped quarters with their extended family members. Low earning jobs and rising unemployment have been shown to be negatively correlated with political satisfaction and government approval in Hong Kong (266). As a result of their rising frustrations with social immobility, Hong Kong people began to blame their government for the shrinking housing availability and employment opportunities. The correlation between happiness and dissenting political attitudes is an instrumental contributor to Hong Kong's protest culture. Unhappy youth, as a result of their socioeconomic insecurity, are more inclined to engage in boycotts, protests, and strikes (Lorenzini 399). Thus, it is understandable that due to the majority of Hong Kong youth's dissatisfaction with growing socioeconomic immobility, exacerbated by a rise in housing prices and unemployment, many frustrated youths took their anger to the streets during the anti-government protests. The demands for government accountability to support disenfranchised

populations thus contributed to the anger and violence that fuelled not only the 2014 Umbrella Movement, but also the 2019 AntiELAB Protests.

While the socioeconomic environment in Hong Kong did not drastically worsen between 2014 and 2019, its slow but persistent deterioration nevertheless aggravated feelings of insecurity amongst citizens. These vulnerabilities were especially prominent as a result of the government's inability to resolve persisting issues given the five-year gap between the two protests. This fuelled increasing anger towards Hong Kong's leadership that exacerbated the violent and desperate nature of the 2019 AntiELAB Movement. Between 2014 and 2019, the already exorbitant housing prices in Hong Kong rose from 120 to 180 on the housing price index, meaning that real estate value had risen over 50% within a five-year period (See Appendix A) ("Hong Kong House Price Index, 1994-2020 Data" Trading Economics). In 2018, the average price for residential property in Hong Kong was the highest in the world, at over US\$2091 per square foot. This was almost double the price of the second most expensive country, Singapore, which had an average housing value of US\$1063 per square foot (Rudden). Furthermore, salary data shows that even for college students with prestigious degrees, monthly paychecks could not compete with the rate in which housing prices continued to soar. The sustained increase in real estate value compared to slow growth of real wages in the five years leading up to the AntiELAB Protests magnified the deep dissatisfaction over the government's inability to meet its people's needs. For many Hong Kong citizens, buying a residential flat is becoming increasingly out of reach. (S. Lee). The average Hong Kong citizen who faced little hope of starting a family or achieving economic stability, were thus motivated to grab a helmet and black T-shirt and take to the streets to fight for a democratic cause that could hopefully push for a better socioeconomic

future. While these disenfranchised citizens partook in the demonstrations due to their anger about the Extradition Law, the deteriorating socioeconomic circumstances meant that they already had little to lose. As a result, the intense emotions and violence on the streets in 2019 can be partially attributed to dissatisfaction over housing shortage and wage stagnation in Hong Kong.

Rising levels of inequality in Hong Kong is most likely another factor driving the protests in 2019. Although Hong Kong enjoyed almost full employment levels and high GDP per capita in early 2019, wealth distribution is a persistent issue that continues to threaten the livelihoods of many households in the city. A powerful yet often ignored factor underlying the frustrations of Hong Kong people is this socioeconomic disparity. Hong Kong's Gini coefficient stood at 53.9 in 2019, the highest it has ever been in the 45 years since the city's handover. Considering other developed economies have Gini coefficients averaging 38.8, Hong Kong's score shows the city clearly lags behind in its ability to alleviate economic imbalances (Hung). Hong Kong's level of inequality has forced around 1.4 million people or 600,000 households to live below the poverty line (Shek). Many of these people have grown resentful of Hong Kong's socioeconomic environment which seems to prioritize wealthy mainland Chinese families and firms. As a result, many of the poorest in Hong Kong were inspired to take part in the 2019 AntiELAB Movement in order to fight against Chinese monopolistic encroachment. Assuming that even 5 percent of these disenfranchised citizens took to the streets, this already contributed to 70,000 angry activists fighting in the name of the AntiELAB Movement. With the protests against the Extradition Bill, disenfranchised younger generations were given an opportunity to air out their anger and hopelessness in a public setting. Therefore, with growing inequality and the lack of a

clear solution to their socioeconomic circumstances, many disenfranchised young activists used the 2019 AntiELAB Protests to push for ‘mutual destruction’, enacting increasingly radical actions in hopes to rebel against the government and system that failed to save them.

Finally, unlike the 2014 Umbrella Movement, the 2019 AntiELAB Protests had devastating economic impacts on local businesses and unemployment. This exacerbated frustrations that propelled the protests even further. One of the major reasons the 2014 Umbrella Movement wasn’t able to gain as much traction as the 2019 Movement was because it didn’t significantly affect Hong Kong’s economy or unemployment rate. The core of Hong Kong’s economy relies on its import and export sector, which in 2014 made up around 35 percent of the Special Administrative Region’s GDP (Headley). During the 2014 Umbrella Movement, total trade flows in the region was up five percent compared to 2013. Additionally, unemployment rates held relatively constant at 3.3 percent even during the protests. Under the Umbrella Movement, which had the potential to lower Hong Kong’s GDP by 30 percent, the Hang Seng Index value only fell by 6 percent. Even more surprisingly, considering the protests were mainly centered in large shopping districts, retail sales actually rose throughout 2014. Despite the protests, hotels in the city were able to maintain around ninety percent occupancy, and businesses were able to remain open (Headley). The lack of disruption to Hong Kong’s economy, employment, and business sectors ultimately meant that the government did not feel pressured to change its policies during the Umbrella Movement. As long as Hong Kong’s economy remained stable, Beijing had little incentive to grant full universal suffrage to Hong Kong citizens.

On the other hand, the 2019 AntiELAB Protests caused major disruptions to Hong Kong's economy and employment levels. With regards to long-term employment rates, Hong Kong had experienced a steady decline in unemployment until 2019. In the period between 2018 and early 2019, the unemployment rate had even dropped to the lowest that it had been in the city's last five years, falling to 2.8 percent. However, when the 2019 AntiELAB Protests hit, the unemployment rate took a turn for the worse, and by late December, unemployment had peaked at 3.5 percent (See Appendix B) ("Hong Kong Unemployment Rate 1981-2020 Data" Trading Economics). Hong Kong's typically resilient labor market began to show signs of strain as the city's hotels, restaurants, and shopping malls were hit by a sharp slowdown due to reduced spending and tourism. As people began to lose their jobs, more citizens became available to take to the streets. The lack of an occupation holding activists back further contributed to protest participation and the continued city-wide vandalism in the name of the AntiELAB Movement (Lam). Unlike 2014 when the GDP was barely affected and the unemployment rate remained low, the 2019 protests brought larger threats to Hong Kong's long-term economic health. As a result of the protests' economic impact, the panicked Hong Kong government felt they had to engage in increasingly drastic actions to try and quell the demonstrations. On October 4th 2019, Carrie Lam invoked the colonial-era Emergency Regulations Ordinance to implement the Prohibition on Face Covering Regulation, or the Anti-Mask Law, in hopes to hold protesters accountable to violent actions (K. Cheng). The Anti-Mask Law generated outrage as it was seen as a further infringement on Hong Kong citizens' freedom of public action. The new law was widely ignored, with protesters continuing to wear masks in the name of defiance and public disruption. Furthermore, Hong Kong's rising unemployment also aggravated many



non-protesting groups to retaliate against AntiELAB activists. The spike in unemployment also affected civilians who were not engaged in the protests. Many pro-Beijing and anti-protest groups grew increasingly frustrated with Hong Kong's slowing economy as a result of the city-wide demonstrations, prompting them to add fuel to the fire by antagonizing pro-democracy activists on the streets. As a result, both sides of the movement continued to clash and disagree with each other. This polarized Hong Kong's protests environment, which further aggravated and prolonged the chaotic nature of the 2019 AntiELAB Movement.

Hong Kong's worsening socioeconomic situation proved that the city's government was incapable of confronting inflating housing prices or escalating unemployment. Despite protesters in the Umbrella Movement calling for fundamental socioeconomic changes, the government ignored citizens' pleas due to the lack of an economic threat that the 2014 protests posed. As a result of the government's inability to address crucial socioeconomic issues, many citizens grew increasingly angry at Hong Kong's status quo. Therefore, the worsening social and economic environment experienced by disenfranchised groups in Hong Kong ultimately contributed to the desperate and frenzied nature of the 2019 AntiELAB Protests.

### **Changes in Protest Strategy**

In addition to political and socioeconomic factors, the tactics and innovative strategies of the protesters themselves contributed to the lengthy and violent nature of the 2019 AntiELAB Movement. In order to better avoid police capture, AntiELAB activists adapted to their shortcomings in the 2014 Umbrella Movement, ultimately allowing them to engage in extreme actions while avoiding legal consequences. The disorganized nature of the AntiELAB Movement

was further exacerbated by the lack of a clear leader that protesters could look up to, as well as the flexible mentality activists developed whilst dealing with the authorities. These unique tactics allowed the AntiELAB Movement to sustain its trajectory much more effectively than the Umbrella Movement.

The 2014 Umbrella Movement was widely praised for its well-organized execution as a result of the guidance from its respected leaders. The Umbrella Movement's leadership helped direct the protest groups, allowing activists to effectively follow certain rules while engaging in street protests. These rules included the leaders' calls for acts of non-violence, as well as pleas to engage in protests only at specific locations and times. The main leaders of the Umbrella Movement were professors, religious figures, and students from the Hong Kong Federation of Students and Scholars. Dubbed the Occupy Trio, the non-student leadership consisted of Associate Professor of Law Benny Tai Yiu-ting, Associate Professor of Sociology Chan Kin-man, and longtime pro-democracy advocate Reverend Chu Yiu-ming (Arranz). Because the Occupy Trio were esteemed figures in their academic and religious fields, protesters felt they had emotional security by relying on these figureheads throughout the duration of the movement. As a result, the followers of the Umbrella Movement openly adhered to the Occupy Trio's principles of non-violence, peace, and pragmatism during the 2014 movement. Furthermore, followers of the Umbrella Movement were eager to maintain certain behaviours as a result of the directions invoked by key student leaders. Student leaders such as Joshua Wong, Nathan Law, and Lester Shum generated trust in the majority-student protest movement. The Hong Kong Federation of Students and Scholars were able to encourage young protesters to maintain their peaceful and organized approach to the movement (Arranz). Relatable student leaders paved the way for

student activists to follow the core messaging of the Umbrella Movement, rather than deviate and lash out on their own accord. The structured and passionate group of both professional and student leaders in 2014 allowed the Umbrella Movement to be a protest of peace and general passivity. While there were some instances of physical retaliation against authority figures, most of the protests were violence-free. Therefore, clear leadership can be understood as a contributing factor in making the 2014 Umbrella Movement much less disorderly compared to the 2019 AntiELAB Movement.

In comparison to the Umbrella Movement, the leaderless nature of the AntiELAB Movement contributed to the radical and divergent actions of the 2019 protesters. The lack of leadership in the AntiELAB Protests meant there were no specific rules and ideologies to motivate the actions of the demonstrators. While in the 2014 Umbrella Movement the leaders promoted explicit non-violence, the 2019 AntiELAB activists were not held to the same level of accountability. Instead, AntiELAB protesters were more likely to act out rashly, and commit acts of violence or public disruption in the name of democracy. Without a leader, protesters were also more likely to split off into a wider number of protesting groups. This meant that a larger quantity of demonstrations would happen throughout Hong Kong at the same time. This made it difficult for authorities to monitor what different groups were doing at peak hours, further contributing to the disruptive nature of the AntiELAB Movement.

Another reason the 2014 Umbrella Movement was so well organized and peaceful was because participants had much more time and a larger capacity to prepare. While Beijing's push for pre-approved election candidates occurred in August, Occupy Central only officially began on September 26th ("Hong Kong protests: Timeline of the occupation"). This was unlike the

2019 Extradition Law and Bill, which after being suddenly announced to the Hong Kong public, immediately triggered citizens to take to the streets. The one-month buffer period between the 2014 voting law's announcement and the beginning of the Umbrella Movement gave protesters enough time to plan out logistics for their occupation and tactics for the demonstrations. In the week leading up to September 26th, Joshua Wong and other student leaders were able to gather sufficient donations and supplies for the Occupy Central Protests. Activists were also able to set up hundreds of tents which would end up forming small temporary 'villages' all over the city. Additionally, volunteer communities were able to stock up supplies to provide protesters with water and other basic necessities at demonstration sites. This preparation time even allowed for demonstrators to set up study areas complete with desks and Wi-Fi for student activists to do their homework ("Hong Kong protests: Instant architecture and the Occupy Central 'village'"). As a result of the sufficient preparation time leading up to the 2014 protests, more than 200 volunteers were able to be mobilized to support the Occupy Central village project and assist demonstrators during the Umbrella Movement (E. Cheng). Therefore, without the lead time given to protesters, it would have been difficult for activists to prepare for the Umbrella Movement's well-structured, non-violent, and goal-oriented protests. Time is thus an important factor in evaluating the peaceful nature of the Umbrella Movement compared to the AntiELAB Protests.

The lessons protesters learned from the 2014 Umbrella Movement played a critical role in determining the frenzied nature of the 2019 AntiELAB Movement. Since 2014, activists have analyzed their shortcomings and better equipped themselves to deal with police tactics. Their learned experience from the Umbrella Movement informed them to adopt flexible maneuvers in

order to sustain longer and more impactful demonstrations during the AntiELAB Movement. One of the main takeaways from the 2014 demonstrations was that protesters should no longer stay in one place in order to effectively demand change. During the Umbrella Movement, protesters gathered solely around the Central and Admiralty regions of Hong Kong. This enabled the police to repeatedly and easily disperse the protesters. As activists continued to be halted by police intervention, many of them became tired of having their momentum disrupted and ultimately gave up on the demonstrations. Because protesters abided by a static occupation of Hong Kong's streets, the Umbrella Movement failed to gain momentum. As time passed, the government simply waited out the protest by refusing to budge. The movement ultimately ended when the last central occupier was ushered off by the police. Thus, when the 2019 AntiELAB Protests began, activists swore to not let their previous failures repeat themselves. As a result, the protesters took inspiration from a local hero, Bruce Lee, who famously advised: "be water" (Dapiran). Hong Kong's young activists chose to abandon their stubborn occupation strategy of the past in favour of highly agile, water-like protest tactics. AntiELAB gatherings constantly shifted, often starting off as peaceful marches that quickly morphed into dispersed rallies. These rallies would flow through the streets of Hong Kong, with demonstrations rapidly shifting locations throughout the day. The mottos "no central stage" and "be water" guided the activists by encouraging fluid movement through Hong Kong, often creating new protest sites by the hour (F. Lee 15). These tactics were made possible due to the increased use of digital technologies that quickly notified protesters what to do, where to be, and most importantly how to avoid the police (F. Lee 14). Hundreds of thousands of individuals could thus use these technologies to quickly disperse and reappear in a different location to further press their demands, cause

disruption, and push for anti-Chinese agendas. Protesters even developed their own police- and protest-tracking app called HKmap.live. The app crowdsourced the location of police and anti-government protests which helped protesters find demonstrating groups, and allowed them to avoid police capture (Murdock). Therefore, the ability for protesters to “be formless, shapeless, like water” allowed them to avoid the authorities and engage in increasingly divergent actions. As a result of these new protest strategies and mentalities, the 2019 AntiELAB Protests were more violent and prolonged compared to the 2014 Umbrella Movement.

Unlike the 2014 protests, the 2019 AntiELAB protesters also had excessively eager goals that were less likely to be satisfied by any actions by the Hong Kong government. The protester’s initial demand was very specific, pushing the government to withdraw the Extradition Bill. However, as the protests developed, the activists’ demands grew more and more radical. It became increasingly difficult for Beijing to meet the protesters’ seemingly outlandish requests. This could be especially said for the fifth demand: allowing Hong Kong to immediately achieve universal suffrage. With Beijing’s unwillingness to meet protesters’ concessions, violent demonstrations continued to ravage Hong Kong throughout 2019. This issue of radical demands was further exacerbated by the actions of the most extreme and violent protesters. These outliers did not seem to be motivated by the specific five demands issued by the AntiELAB coalition. Instead, these radicalists seemed to be made up of unsatisfied citizens looking to vent out their frustrations over the Hong Kong government in general. Even after Carrie Lam officially withdrew the Extradition Bill, these outliers continued to set fire to public transportation, barricade the streets with bricks, and attack anyone who sought to oppose them. Therefore, because the AntiELAB Movement lacked a clear leader, was driven by protesters’ overly

ambitious demands, and was aggravated by activists' agile protest tactics, the originally organized anti-government rallies quickly devolved into a chaotic and anarchic campaign that left a permanent scar in Hong Kong's historically peaceful political landscape..

### **Technology, Social, and Mass Media**

A fundamental factor that affected the different trajectories between the 2014 Umbrella Movement and the 2019 AntiELAB Protests was the way in which protesters consumed media and utilized technology. In 2014, both local and global broadcast media covering the Umbrella Movement were relatively positive and much less pointed. Additionally, social media was primarily used by the Umbrella Movement activists to efficiently organize peaceful sit-ins and marches. However, the 2019 protests saw an increase in the weaponization of social media, mass media, and technology forms to promote radicalized anti-government sentiments. This contributed to the overall chaotic and long-lasting nature of the AntiELAB Movement. The inflammation of polarizing views throughout Hong Kong media ultimately exacerbated the tumultuous nature of the 2019 AntiELAB Protests.

Access to bipartisan local media coverage in 2014 was a main contributor to the Umbrella Movement's gentler emotional ardor compared to the 2019 AntiELAB Movement. The existence of print and broadcast media forms that sympathized with protesters' sentiments ensured that Hong Kong citizens felt their cries for help were being understood. On one hand, some media outlets still continued to pander to Beijing. TVB, Hong Kong's largest public broadcast station, drew multiple complaints for its biased pro-government reporting. Additionally, after organized gangs descended on Mongkok and physically assaulted

pro-democracy demonstrators, Beijing-sponsored newspaper the Oriental Daily chose to outline protesters' disruption of city-wide traffic instead of the gang violence (Kuo). Activists were enraged at the Oriental Daily's failure to highlight any of the abuses enacted by triad members. While these two examples underscore the negative reporting about the Umbrella Movement activists, protesters did not feel misrepresented in 2014 due to other news outlets calling attention to the protester's points of view. During the Umbrella Movement, two of the main media outlets that Hong Kong protesters trusted for fair representation were South China Morning Post (SCMP), Hong Kong's largest English-language newspaper, as well as Apple Daily, Hong Kong's most popular tabloid-style newspaper. These two publications tended to engage in neutral reporting, often appealing to the majority of Hong Kong's population. For example, on the day after the organized mob attacks on protesters in Mongkok in 2014, SCMP and Apple Daily both highlighted the violence of the triad attacks on protesters (Kuo). The fact that these two local Hong Kong media outlets were willing to outline the protesters' views allowed citizens to embrace their identity as Hong Kongers and have faith in their own media institutions. With local media support and fair reporting on the Umbrella Movement, many protesters felt relieved that freedom of press and media democracy still existed in Hong Kong despite the city's contentious political environment. Therefore, relatively bipartisan reporting of the Umbrella Movement generated a less aggravated protest culture in comparison to the AntiELAB Movement.

In contrast with the 2014 Umbrella Movement, the 2019 AntiELAB Protests saw a weaponized use of mass media that generated polarized enclaves of hate and misinformation. This led to an increasingly tense and contentious protest environment in Hong Kong. The main



reason the 2019 AntiELAB Movement was propelled so intensely by media polarization was due to the police's initial use of violence in the early demonstrations. Appalled by Carrie Lam's call for police retaliation, citizens recorded footage of police pepper spraying innocent bystanders, beating up fleeing protesters, and firing rubber bullets at illegal close ranges. Such videos and images circulated the internet in many pro-democracy groups and advocacy pages. These forms of media were used to push forward the narrative that the Chinese-backed police force and the Hong Kong government are unfair and unjust. On the other hand, pro-police groups began to resent Hong Kong's increasingly chaotic protest culture. Many of them felt alienated and targeted relentlessly, having had their lives significantly disrupted as a result of the prolonged unrest. These pro-police groups also recorded and posted separate footage of protesters attacking police headquarters, vandalizing property, and setting people on fire (Withnall). Anti-protest groups thus used these videos to argue that Hong Kong's protesting population is violent, uneducated, and simply seeking a disordered society. The clashing narratives of the protests disseminated into isolated echo-chambers both online and in mainstream media, fuelling bitter sentiments amongst the conflicting sides of the protests. While the police and freedom-fighters both believed they were fighting for a better Hong Kong, the inability for both sides to meet in the middle due to media polarization factored into the intense and violent nature of the 2019 AntiELAB Movement.

Another main reason the 2019 protests have seen such violence amongst dissenting sides is due to Hong Kong citizens' increased use of social and communication media in the protests as a result of not having a leadership figure to guide them. In general, social media acts as a toxic environment for polarized thought and unorganized protests. Platforms like Facebook—which

combine the personal and public—have become politically potent. Due to how the algorithms of these networks work, social media sites encourage engagement in politics that often focus on one side of the overall picture (Tufeki 23). Social media algorithms feed users with the same type of information that they have previously engaged in. For example, AntiELAB activists continued to see and engage with content that painted the police and the government in a negative light. These activists would never be exposed to other aspects of the movement such as protesters acting out irrationally, destroying public property, or physically attacking the opposition. The AntiELAB protesters' social media feeds were thus only filled with posts from groups that they already followed, which consists of ideologies that mirror that of the user. The same can be said for anti-protest or pro-Beijing supporters who only saw content of protesters being violent, without receiving news on police brutality or government incompetence (Banjo). The echo chambers generated by social media niches created a potent digital space for thought polarization. These conflicting sentiments and misinformation that spread between opposing groups only fuelled the anger on both sides, encouraging increasingly extreme actions from both parties as time progressed. Therefore, by spreading one-sided information and instilling polarized ideologies, social media coerced the 2019 AntiELAB Protests to become more chaotic and divisive than the 2014 Umbrella Movement.

In addition to social media, mass news media also played an important role in exacerbating polarization during the AntiELAB Movement. In the time between 2014 and 2019, several of Hong Kong's main media outlets lost much of their control to either the Chinese government or large Chinese companies. In 2015, SCMP, one of Hong Kong's previously most trusted bipartisan media outlets, was bought by the mainland Chinese company Alibaba. This

proved problematic as Alibaba is one of the world's most prominent pro-Beijing organizations (Hernández). As a result, many protesters saw SCMP's reporting in 2019 as biased propaganda originating from the Chinese state. The loss of local reporting accountability, and the sense that local publications were no longer in support of Hong Kong activists' rhetoric spurred anxieties over the reliability of free press in Hong Kong. This ultimately encouraged an escalation in extreme protest tactics to push for free press and unbiased reporting during the 2019 protests. Additionally, as the protests began to devolve, all media publications in Hong Kong, regardless of their political alignments, felt obligated to report on certain violent actions enacted by some protesters. Local media outlets such as Apple Daily, SCMP, and TVB generated reports about protesters throwing petrol bombs into open streets, setting ablaze public trains, and smashing in the windows of stores affiliated with mainland Chinese owners (Connors). While these news coverages were fair and indicative of the protests' situation, it only exacerbated the disappointment felt by AntiELAB activists. Many felt that the Hong Kong media had betrayed them, and that the lack of reporting that supported protesters was a sign of the city's faltering free press. As a result, activists became more motivated to retaliate against the government using increasingly violent methods, as they felt there was no local media support for them anyway.

The West's obsession over anti-Chinese ideologies and their pro-democracy sentiments also overshadowed much of their global reporting, leading to a biased westernized depiction of the Hong Kong protests. Global media capitalism was thus a key contributor to the polarized political landscape in Hong Kong. Twenty-first century global journalism is currently dominated by Western news services, which mostly encompass the United States and its network of influence. Global corporate media firms are thus purveyors of Western ideals and culture, and

are slow to criticize any actions that threaten the Euro-centric democratic ordeals (McChesney). In the 2019 Hong Kong protests, many American mass media outlets such as CNN, ABC, MSNBC tended to avoid topics regarding protesters' violent actions in order to paint a positive picture of Hong Kong's demonstrations that aligned with the West's pro-democracy ideology. For example, issues such as the stoning of a 70 year old man to death as he tried to disassemble the protesters' barricades were never reported by most Western news in fears of painting the AntiELAB Movement, and by extension the pro-democracy sentiments that antagonize China, in a negative light (Creery). As a result, AntiELAB protesting groups continued to consume a narrow range of Western news sources compounded by their lack of trust for local Hong Kong reporting. This in turn fuelled their angry and resentful sentiments towards the Hong Kong police and government. Therefore, polarized attitudes encouraged by biased Western news reporting further drove activists to engage with extreme actions during the 2019 AntiELAB Protests.

Finally, the types of technology used to mobilize activists inflamed the radical and chaotic progression of the AntiELAB Movement. In 2019, protesters primarily coordinated their activities through encrypted messaging apps in order to maintain privacy and security. Apps such as Bridgefy and Telegram used mobile device's Bluetooth function to bounce communication off individuals' phones, transferring messages between thousands of individuals while avoiding the internet. Bridgefy saw 60,000 app installations in the final week of August 2019, and an overall 4000 percent increase in its app usage within the first two months of the AntiELAB Movement (Koetsier). Because the messages were transferred over Bluetooth rather than Wi-Fi, protesters could communicate with each other without encountering the dangers of their messages being intercepted by authorities. These online platforms enabled activists to engage in sustained human

resource mobilization and high volumes of strategic discussions despite the absence of political leaders. While these technologies helped protesters peacefully organize in the initial stages of the protests, the technologies began proving more problematic over time. Without a leader, these apps could be used to radicalize citizens pushing them to pursue violent actions against police and other opposition members. Radical activists used apps like Bridgefy to directly encourage other demonstrators to engage in mass disruptions of Hong Kong's daily life. Many people were thus easily persuaded to engage in aggressive protest tactics such as burning trains, cutting off traffic wires, and graffiting major buildings while avoiding the legal restraints. Communication technology promoted large-scale chaotic gatherings that often spiraled out of control. This encouraged a divergence from the movement's initial core of achieving democracy and demanding the Extradition Bill to be retracted.

As a result of new technology's ability to mobilize groups of protesters, in addition to mass media's political and commercial alignments, the AntiELAB Protests were pushed to a point of escalation. The increasingly polarized sentiments encouraged by technology and media from both sides of the AntiELAB Protests ultimately contributed to the tumultuous trajectory of the 2019 movement compared to that of 2014.

## **Conclusion: The Future of Protests and Politics in Hong Kong**

Hong Kong's political environment was forever changed on September 28th 2014. As police fired tear gas for the first time at hundreds of thousands of Hong Kong citizens, the Umbrella Movement and Hong Kong's fight for democracy officially began. Fast forward five years to 2019. Hong Kong was yet again embroiled in an anti-government movement, this time even bigger and more defiant. Despite Beijing's attempts to diminish the city's anti-government sentiments, Hong Kong citizens emerged stronger than ever, taking to the streets and wreaking havoc in the name of democracy and independence. Growing dissatisfaction over Hong Kong's lack of political security and democratic backsliding made each mass protest stronger than the last. The seeds of grassroots pro-democracy political activism had begun to sprout.

The importance of these pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong are undeniable. The 2014 Umbrella Movement motivated many Hong Kong youth to become more engaged with the city's politics. The movement also attracted global attention, bringing to light the growing issues of Chinese encroachment in East Asia. Additionally, the Umbrella Movement uncovered flaws in Hong Kong's Basic Law and Joint Declaration. Following the Umbrella Movement, the 2019 AntiELAB Movement continued to send important shockwaves throughout Hong Kong's democratic environment as well as the global political system. The AntiELAB Protests brought into focus Beijing's increased sharp power in Hong Kong despite public push-back against Chinese control. Furthermore, the protests gave disenfranchised populations in Hong Kong a platform to air out their frustrations regarding socioeconomic problems that were often previously overshadowed. The 2019 AntiELAB Movement thus acted as a second awakening for

Hong Kong citizens, re-instilling a sense of Hong Kong patriotism and democratic values that fuelled the city's radical protest culture.

Despite the benefits of Hong Kong protests in fighting for democratic accountability and political liberalism, the 2019 AntiELAB Movement in particular saw an escalation of violence and extremism that not only made it difficult for the government to manage the city, but also alienated many pro-democracy supporters. It proved difficult for a majority of non-protesting citizens to sympathize with a pro-democracy movement that ultimately devastated Hong Kong's peaceful identity, led its economy into a recession, and generated an apocalyptic atmosphere. Those who admired and supported the core ideas of the movement often recoiled at the extremist agendas of radical activists aiming to 'self-destruct' and take the city down with them. This study argues that such radical actions did not occur in a vacuum. Instead, this study outlined the five main factors that caused the 2019 AntiELAB Movement's extreme protest trajectory compared to that of 2014 Umbrella Movement: the Extradition Bill's immediate threat to Hong Kong citizens' personal safeties, Beijing's increasing unwillingness to honor Hong Kong's political sanctity, growing socioeconomic disenfranchisement, a rise in violent yet fluid protest strategies, and media induced polarization. As long as the underlying causes of the 2019 AntiELAB Movement's chaotic nature remain unaddressed, this study argues that the return of another protest movement may not only be inevitable, but will also be even more extreme.

As Hong Kong's political atmosphere takes hit after hit through anti-government uprisings, the questions as to what the city's future holds is unclear yet grim. On October 31st 2019, the Chinese Communist Party's central committee issued a communique after its plenum meeting laying out a strategy to integrate Hong Kong fully into its control. In their plenum,

Beijing stated its intention to *“improve the integration of Hong Kong and Macao into the overall situation of Chinese national development, promoting the advantages of the mainland”*. Beijing announced its plans to reinforce Hong Kong’s legal system as well as strengthen the city’s law enforcement in order to better manage dissent. Most problematically, the committee made clear their intentions of *“strengthening Chinese national, historical, and cultural education, especially amongst public officials and young people”* (Xinhua News Agency) in order to enhance Chinese patriotism in Hong Kong. It is thus becoming increasingly apparent that China has a hardline plan for Hong Kong to return to its full control, and that Beijing intends on preventing external forces from interfering in the city’s affairs. Therefore, as the looming date of 2047 comes closer, and the ‘one country, two systems’ rule begins to disintegrate, China’s unwavering stance sets up the possibility for more political clashes to occur between Hong Kong and Beijing in the near future.

In the end, many pro-democracy activists still felt they had no other choice but to take to the streets and physically fight for their freedoms. While the 2019 AntiELAB Protests may have seemed destructive, counterproductive, and even futile, the movement exposes the frustrated, self-sacrificing and genuinely desperate character of Hong Kong citizens. The AntiELAB Movement was thus a small example of what Hong Kong activists are capable of as a result of refusing to give up their political freedoms to the Chinese Communist Party.

Despite the citizens' continued activism, Hong Kong’s political future is most likely not going to change. While Hong Kong people believe that democracy along with liberal markets is the best political model for the city, the reality is that Beijing does not see Hong Kong’s political economy in the same way. China’s rapid economic growth, despite their continued authoritarian



rule and state control, proves to Beijing that the country's current political system is more than sufficient to meet the nation's long-term goals. It will be difficult for Hong Kong citizens to convince China that the city should maintain its special administrative status with political rights included. To Beijing, Hong Kong's protests are simply acts of extremism and violence that will lead the city to its own self-destruction before it will ever be fully independent.

Instead of pushing back on issues of political independence and long-term democracy, the Hong Kong government must address the underlying causes that triggered both the 2014 and 2019 protests. Hong Kong's leadership must ensure that their citizens feel politically protected by the city's laws, work to reduce inequality and housing shortages, prevent police brutality, and exercise fair unbiased media reporting. The guarantee of Hong Kong citizens promised levels of freedoms and democracy as supposedly enshrined in Hong Kong's Basic Law will ensure that citizens feel they are dutifully protected within the special administrative region; at least until 2047. In addition to addressing issues in Hong Kong's status quo, it is also an imperative that the Hong Kong government focus on working with Beijing to either execute a plan of transition back into the mainland, or work around how Hong Kong's political position will look like after 2047. Beijing and Hong Kong must not repeat their mistakes of the past. They must avoid the types of ambiguities and stalled decision making that undermined the legitimacy of the city's Basic Law and Joint Declaration during the British handover. Governments must put effort into incorporating Hong Kong citizens' opinions in the transition process, and ensure a transparent drafting mechanism when executing future laws and bills. This is the only way in which the chaos of the past can hopefully be avoided in the years to come.

Despite the larger half of 2019 being marred by furious protests and Hong Kong's political atmosphere burning down into chaos, many Hong Kong citizens still remain hopeful of the slim chance they will be able to extend their peaceful political autonomy. While China would like Hong Kong's citizens' behaviour to replicate Macau in respecting Chinese rule, Hong Kong citizens see the situation very differently. For many, Hong Kong's future comes down to whether or not the next generation can show Beijing that the benefits of the city's autonomy outweigh its reunification. A new era in Hong Kong is dawning, but democratic change in the city continues to be unresolved. With the halfway point "one country, two systems" arriving soon in 2022, it is important for the Hong Kong government to start listening to their citizens and protecting their political sanctities. Democracy and freedom in Hong Kong is not static. Instead, it is constantly changing in the context of its social, political and economic dynamics as it relates to the mainland. Through a careful understanding of the intricate relationships between the citizens of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong's Legislative Council, and the Chinese Communist Party, the city's leadership can lead its people to a less tumultuous future. Therefore, this study argues that only by confronting the city's political insecurities, promoting a democratic rule of law, safeguarding citizens' individual rights, and alleviating socioeconomic inequality, will the government be able to prevent the next large protest that has the potential to burn Hong Kong to the ground.

## Appendix

### Appendix A

Graph of Hong Kong Housing Price Index between 2011 and 2020, showing the price changes of residential housing as a percentage change from a 2011 start date of HPI 100



## Appendix B

Graph of Hong Kong Unemployment between 2011 and 2020, showing the fluctuation of unemployment before and after the 2014 and 2019 protests.

### Hong Kong Unemployment Rate 1981-2020 Data | 2021-2022 Forecast | Calendar

Summary Calendar Forecast Stats Download Alerts

1Y 5Y 10Y 25Y MAX Chart Compare Export API Embed



SOURCE: TRADINGECONOMICS.COM | CENSUS AND STATISTICS DEPARTMENT, HONG KONG

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